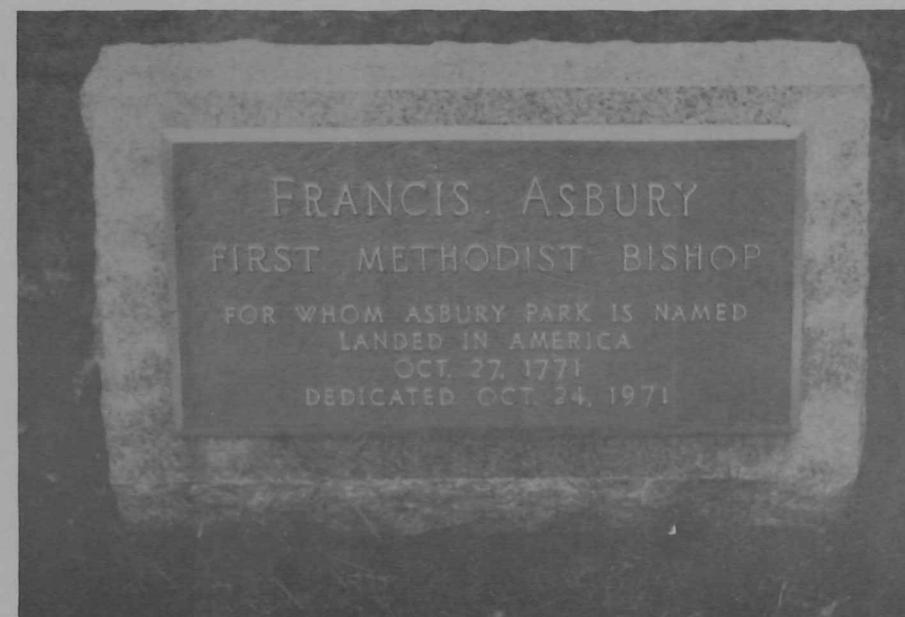


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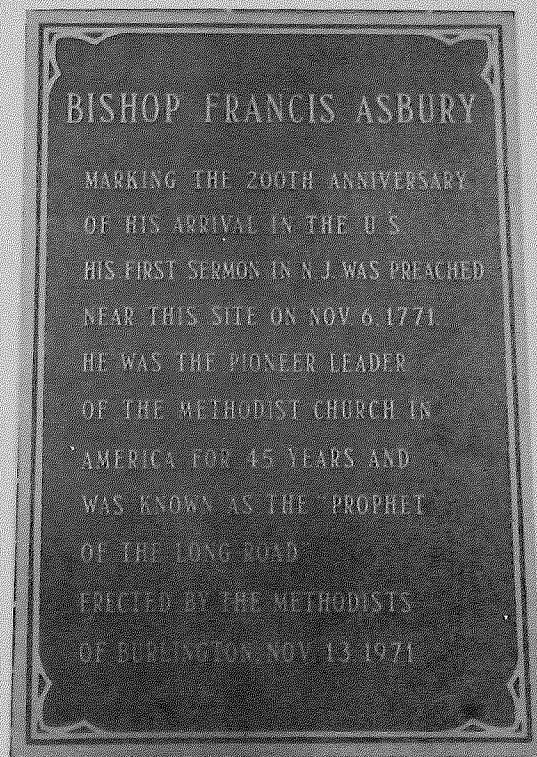
# THE HISTORICAL TRAIL

1972



Asbury Park, New Jersey placed this monument in memory of Bishop Francis Asbury in the town park across from the First United Methodist Church of Asbury Park, New Jersey.

10<sup>2</sup> 13109



This plaque was placed on the First United Methodist Church of Burlington, New Jersey in memory of Bishop Francis Asbury who preached his first sermon in New Jersey, near this spot.

## FOREWORD

This edition of The Historical Trail completes our tenth issue. How we have grown since our first little twelve page, mimeographed pamphlet in 1962! Brief articles appeared that year on "The Blackmans of Great Egg Harbor" by the late Mr. Joseph Henry Bennett; "The Founding of the Pennington School" by the then Headmaster, Dr. Charles R. Smyth; Mr. John W. Zelley related a brief "History of the Historical Society"; and Mr. Walter B. Van Sant wrote the first of a three part article "Lay Activities in the N.J. Conference."

The first printed issue appeared in 1964 as a N.J. Tercenary Issue. Other special issues were the 1969 Pilmore-Boardman Bicentennial Issue, a double issue for 1969 and 1970, and last year's Bishop Francis Asbury's Bicentennial Issue. Copies of some of these have gone all over the United States and to England.

We want to thank our Editor, Dr. J. Hillman Coffee, for preparing this issue for publication. We are pleased to include the address delivered by Bishop Taylor at the Bishop Asbury Bicentennial Program in Burlington on November 13, 1971. The other articles are by the Rev. Robert Williams, minister of the Minotola United Methodist Church, and the Rev. William Kingston of our United Methodist Church in Tuckerton. A cumulative index for all ten issues is also included for your use.

It is the purpose of the Historical Society, in publishing The Historical Trail, to help bring alive to Methodists today the glorious deeds of the heroes of the past. It is hoped that this knowledge and inspiration of our heritage can be a challenge for all to live for Christ today.

Your criticisms, suggestions, and manuscripts for possible publication are solicited. Please communicate with our editor, Dr. J. Hillman Coffee, 17 Brainerd St., Mt. Holly, N.J. 08060.

Robert B. Steelman  
President

## ASBURY AND AMERICAN METHODISM

by  
Bishop Prince A. Taylor, Jr., D.D. Ed.D.  
Resident Bishop of the New Jersey Area

An historical address presented at the Bishop Francis Asbury Bicentennial Celebration at Burlington, New Jersey, November 13, 1971.

While John Wesley is, without doubt, the founder of the Methodist Church, Francis Asbury gave it its American direction. He has frequently been characterized as a man who ruled with a firm hand, who was exacting in his demands, resolute in his determination, singular in his administration, unbending in will, unwilling to share power, and impatient with men who were slow to accept and follow his leadership.

One wonders, however, if a different type leader could have given the young church so firm a foundation in a nation struggling against overwhelming odds to come into being, with a leadership so inadequately equipped for the task, and a people so primitive in style and manner. The true greatness of a man is frequently eclipsed by those who seek to give him wings. It is a disservice to an individual to deny his human frailties. His strengths are determined by the manner in which he overcomes his weaknesses in the wider reaches of his life and leadership. So it was with Francis Asbury.

He was an only child, born of parents who were interested in education and sought desperately to make a scholar out of young Francis. They sent him to school at an early age, and he made a brilliant start. He read the Bible at the age of seven, but his enthusiasm for school terminated early when he became a dropout at the age of twelve. Despite Francis' bad experience in formal education, his parents did succeed in communicating to him their zeal for evangelistic religion. They were Anglican, but they liked the revival style. So did Francis.

He was interested in evangelistic preaching and the intensive fellowship of the converted. The Methodists excelled in both. He liked the way they prayed, with feeling and without the use of a book. He liked the way they sang, with melody and fervor. He liked what he saw in the life and loyalty of the members. Francis became a Methodist society member in the Church of England. He had found religious activity the real concern of his life, but he lacked the university education to become an Anglican preacher.

Being a Methodist gave him some advantages. He had uneasiness about his own salvation. In the Methodist fellowship he became sure that his sins were forgiven and that he was in saving relationship with God. He could preach without university training. John Wesley developed a plan of using unordained men — gifted Methodist society members — as preachers. Several such

preachers would work under an assistant while Wesley superintended all of them. The Methodist societies in England were growing fast and needed preachers, some to be local preachers for groups near their homes and some to be traveling preachers making endless rounds of the classes and societies.

Francis started as a local preacher. In 1766 he had his first appointment as a traveling preacher. While Wesley accepted Lay Preachers, he insisted that they be intellectually alert. Wesley published books — over 100 titles during his life — and he kept the preachers under pressure to read, study, and teach. Francis became a prodigious student.

In 1771, the English Methodist preachers met with Mr. Wesley in Conference at Bristol. During the meeting Wesley said: "Our brethern in America call aloud for help. Who are willing to go over and help them?" Of the five who volunteered, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright were chosen to go. The day of Asbury's landing in Philadelphia was October 27, 1771.

He was not the first Wesleyan Methodist in America; in fact, he was not the first official Methodist missionary in America. Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore had arrived in 1769. Asbury did not begin the work in America. While he was impressed by some of the things he found, he was most unhappy about others. For example, he was not impressed by the discipline among Methodists in either Philadelphia or New York.

It was in Burlington that Asbury showed early and continuous interest. He tells us in his journal on November 6, 1771 (10 days after he had arrived in this country): "I went by Burlington on my way to New York and preached in the court house to a large serious congregation. Here I felt my heart much opened." He refers also to his visit February 28, 1772, "I set off on a rough-gaited horse and after being much shaken, breakfasted at Spottswood; fed my horse again at Crosswicks, and then thought to push on to Burlington, but, the roads being bad, and myself and horse weary, I lodged with a Quaker, on whom I called to inquire the way. He not only invited me to tarry all night, but also treated me with great kindness. The next day I rode to the town very weary, and on the Lord's Day preached in the court house to many hearers."

An indication of the variety of Asbury's concerns is found in his journal May 12, 1772: "Went to Burlington in order to attend the execution of one S., a murderer, and declared to a great number of people under the jail wall, 'He healeth the broken in heart.'" Asbury must have loved Burlington, for he referred to it with deep affection. As early as June 6, 1772, he said, "The little society in Burlington appears to be in a comfortable and prosperous state."

When Asbury began his ministry, New York was a town of just over 20,000. Philadelphia was a hard two-day trip away by wagon.

Baltimore, rising center of Methodism, did not number 5,000 until 1773. The city had no pavements, no city lights, no police, and was known for its mudholes that made the main streets almost impassable in autumn and spring.

Only 3% of the population of the colonies lived in towns of more than eight thousand. Asbury was concerned about getting the preachers out into the country where the people were. He set up more preaching points outside the city and spent more time riding out in the country to show the preachers the way to do it.

Asbury was rigid in his standards for church membership. When he was in New York, he pressed the people hard about their lax discipline. They were allowing non-members to attend the love feasts and society meetings which should be for members only; they were not strict enough about excluding disorderly persons; their zeal as Methodists was not keen enough. The only people acceptable to him were those who were willing to exercise all the restraints of holy living. He drove himself in all weather to preach in the countryside and became so sick that he nearly died.

In New York and Philadelphia, his rigid discipline offended some of the members, including some of the wealthy ones. The circumstances under which Mr. Wesley replaced Mr. Boardman with Francis Asbury are not entirely clear. On October 10, 1772, Asbury received a letter from Mr. Wesley commending strict Methodist discipline and naming him Wesley's assistant for America.

Asbury soon turned his attention South, preaching some mornings at five, preaching some afternoons, preaching most evenings, preaching two or three times on Sundays, holding family prayers and worship at many stops, visiting prisoners, attending and preaching funerals when invited, riding from twenty to fifty miles a day on horseback. The societies multiplied, and the South was becoming a fertile field.

Since Asbury's continued insistence on firm discipline in New York and Philadelphia caused considerable difficulty, Wesley relieved Asbury as his assistant and named someone else. Wesley sent America ordained, Methodist ministers Thomas Rankin and George Shadford. Rankin had been a successful traveling preacher and colleague of John Wesley in England for nearly twelve years. Rankin succeeded Asbury as Wesley's assistant. Asbury accepted the appointment with grace. Rankin was a youngster of twenty-seven years and limited in experience. Asbury had hoped that Wesley himself would come over to direct the work in America. It was not long before problems arose, however, and Asbury began to resist Rankin's leadership. Rankin had a heavy-handed manner that made it difficult for him to bear the freer style of the Americans and enlist their support. The two

men quarrelled. Rankin was a mediocre man — no match for Asbury who exceeded Rankin both in ability and knowledge of America. In 1778, Rankin finally returned to England. Asbury felt that Rankin poisoned Wesley against him, an offense hard to forgive.

Asbury did not give much thought to the revolt of the American colonies against England and was disappointed when Wesley chose to take sides in the Revolution. In his Journal, March 19, 1776, Asbury said: "I . . . am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America." All the missionaries of Great Britain were put through great searching of heart. They were torn between staying in America or returning to England. Asbury and Shadford agreed to spend a day in fasting and prayer to decide what they should do. After the prayer, Asbury felt that he should stay in America; Shadford felt he must return to England. Asbury concluded that one of them must be wrong. Shadford did not agree. Perhaps it was God's will that Asbury should stay and Shadford should go. As things worked out, all returned to England except Asbury. Because of their British connections, all the Methodist preachers born in America were suspects during the war years. Some patriots thought all Methodist preachers were British agents, and some preachers suffered much hardship during this time. Asbury himself faced certain difficulties. He could not bring himself to take the Maryland oath required of all who would work in the colony. He was still a British subject; and as a preacher, he did not choose to bear arms. He escaped to Delaware where the laws were not so rigid, but he was not inactive. Methodist membership increased by 1,800 the two years he was there.

Although the control of the work was placed in the hands of a committee when Rankin left the country, Asbury felt personal responsibility for it. In fact, his name was not mentioned among the committee members. Asbury emerged, however, as the man of greatest stature in Wesleyan Methodism in America.

There were difficult problems which he had to face as he asserted his leadership. The unordained, native southern preachers wanted to administer the sacraments. They had never been closely bound to English Wesleyanism. They had the example of Strawbridge who had administered the sacraments, though unordained. At the conference at Deer Creek in 1777, some American preachers wanted separation from the Church of England and the right to administer the sacraments. The decision was to take no step that year to separate. The struggle between the preachers of the North and South created a crisis over the question of ordination, but Asbury skillfully averted the breach.

In 1783, 89% of the Methodist members were below what is now the Mason and Dixon line. From these Southern revivals came the

young preachers to man the circuits which would fill the great spaces of the South and West. Their churchly traditions were not strong. They were a long way from Wesley. Wesley held a high view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He wanted all Methodists to be faithful communicants in the Church of England. The societies in America had no real chance to hold that standard. Francis Asbury viewed the matter practically and spoke very little about sacraments before 1784.

A substantial group of Methodist preachers felt themselves called both to preach and to administer the sacraments. Wesley had to face this problem.

Then there was the matter of superintending the Methodists in America. Asbury was making continuous rounds of the work — New York to New Jersey to eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. He had not been given an official title, but it was plain that he was the man best acquainted with the field. Wesley had letters from Asbury's friends in America who did not wish to have him moved or superseded.

Wesley sent Asbury a letter October 3, 1783, just a month after peace was signed. It was a letter intended for all American preachers.

"Let all of you be determined to abide by the Methodist doctrine and discipline published in the four volumes of Sermons and Notes Upon the New Testament, together with the Large Minutes of the Conference. . .

"I do not wish our American brethren to receive any who make any difficulty for Francis Asbury as the General Assistant."

This gave American Methodism a temporary, clear status. It was to be like English Methodism in belief and structure, and it was to be under the direction of Wesley's man, Francis Asbury. However he may have depended on Asbury's help in forming the new church in America, there is no evidence that he consulted Asbury directly about the plan for forming the Church here.

In February, 1784, Wesley outlined to Dr. Thomas Coke, an Oxford scholar and Wesley's trusted associate, his new plan for establishing a Methodist Church in America complete with ordained clergy. He suggested that Coke be the one to go to America to ordain the clergy. Coke, like Wesley, was both a Methodist preacher and an ordained minister in the Church of England. Wesley felt sure from his studies that presbyters, being essentially of the same order as bishops, had the power to ordain, and further, or ordain a bishop from their own member.

Coke was convinced of the rightness of the decision but wanted all the support he could get, so he insisted that Wesley first ordain him a bishop. With the assistance of two deacons whom Wesley had previously ordained, he consecrated Thomas Coke as "superintendent". The way was now clear for Methodists to ordain their clergy in the New World. Whatcoat and Vasey ac-

companied Dr. Coke to America. They brought a letter and documents from Wesley. The documents set forth Mr. Wesley's position concerning the new church, in which he announced his appointment of Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be Joint Superintendents "over our brethren in North America."

While Asbury did not oppose the plan, he felt that it it were to work, the American preachers must be involved in it from the start and a substantial majority must approve it all the way. A word from Mr. Wesley was not enough. Americans did not take well any direction from England; the authority must reside in the body of preachers themselves. Asbury said he would accept Mr. Wesley's appointment to serve along with Dr. Coke only if the preachers chose him.

It was at the famous Christmas Conference held in the Lovely Lane Meeting House that Asbury was elected by his peers, ordained deacon and elder, and consecrated a bishop. The Methodists had launched an independent and national organization in America, and it was Francis Asbury who would be its distinguished leader. John Wesley was an old man who would not be coming to America again, and Coke was not well accepted by the American preachers. He stayed in America less than six months after the Christmas Conference. The crucial work of testing the young church in operation fell on Asbury.

Asbury felt that the office of a superintendent was precisely that of a bishop. He began at once to wear for Sunday services the garb and gown of a bishop of the Church of England. When some of his frontier preachers poked fun at it, he gave up the garb rather than make an issue of it, but he did not give up his view of the bishop's office and power. Since it was the conference of preachers who had elected him bishop, he was amenable to their action as a body. Until and unless they acted to remove or discipline him, he was the leader of the whole church, preachers and people. His theory was that a bishop is chosen to rule. At the conferences, Asbury made most of the motions. He spoke to the motions as he was inclined, and he presided over the whole discussion and kept the minutes. It was said of him that "He knew the difference between the important and the less important. On the less important matters he demonstrated his grace; on the more important matters he managed to prevail."

Bishop Asbury preached to black and white alike and was opposed to slavery. He ran into difficulty, however, in his practical administration, since many Methodists lived in states where the law did not allow the freedom of Negroes and many church members were loath to give up their slaves. It seems that Asbury was inclined to compromise at this point.

In 1785, Bishop Asbury invited Richard Allen, later Bishop Allen of the A.M.E. Church, to travel with him. Allen reported:



"He told me that in slave countries, Carolina, and other places, I must not intermix with the slaves. I would frequently have to sleep in his carriage, and he would allow me my victuals and clothes." Allen refused to travel under these conditions.

Harry Hoosier, nicknamed "Black Harry," did travel with him. While he could neither read nor write, Harry had a remarkable memory and was a brilliant preacher. He would memorize the Bishop's sermons and preach them as his own words. Asbury frequently announced that Black Harry would preach in order to draw crowds for himself. Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia characterized Black Harry as the greatest orator in America.

Asbury did not open the way for effective lay representation in the conferences. It was the traveling preacher who gave up all to serve, he felt. The traveling preacher and his traveling brothers had the interest of the church most at heart and should rule. If anyone else wanted to share this right, let him become a traveling preacher.

One of the factors which made Methodism grow so rapidly was the personal presence of Asbury himself in the total affairs of the church. When Thomas Coke wanted to send Asbury a letter in 1787, he simply addressed it "The Reverend Bishop Francis Asbury, North America". It was delivered. He went everywhere. His Journal shows that he went into New York state more than 50 times; New Jersey over 60; Pennsylvania 78; Maryland 80; North Carolina 63; South Carolina 46; Virginia 84; Tennessee and Georgia, each 20; Massachusetts 23 times after his first visit there in 1791. He literally wore out himself and his horses in the the interest of the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Methodist Church. It was his custom to send no preacher into a territory that he himself had not first visited. "I am willing to travel and preach as long as I live," he said, "and I hope that I shall not live long after I am unable to travel." He preached wherever he stopped.

When Asbury came traveling and preaching, he knew what he wanted to find. In every place where there was a population; he wanted to find a congregation of working Methodists. He felt that the nucleus of the congregation should be the class, the body of confessing Christians who were pressing on in the pursuit of perfection. Every class had a leader, one of the best men available from their own number. His responsibility was to know exactly where each member of his class was in his personal religious pilgrimage.

The circuit riders contributed significantly to the growth of the church. One reason was the presiding elder. Not all the preachers had been ordained before 1784, and these unordained men could not administer the sacraments. As the presiding elders visited

their brethren for that purpose, they exercised some supervision as well. The more progressive elders were responsible for overseeing districts. Asbury took this loose arrangement and made it his finest tool as bishop. The presiding elder was the bishop's man in the district.

When Asbury became bishop in 1784, there had been 83 traveling preachers and a membership just short of 15,000. In 1815, the year before he died, the traveling preachers numbered more than 700 and the local preachers more than 2,000. The church membership numbered 212,000. Much of this was due to Methodist participation in the revival movement. It is said that some of Asbury's happiest hours were spent in revival meetings.

Asbury's greatest contribution to the life of Methodism was his skill in organization and his commitment to the spread of the Gospel. In his Journal, March 30, 1797, he said, "The prosperity of the work of God depends much on having proper men for any and every part of the work." He spoke with such prophetic insight. While there are wide variances between the structure of the Church and society of his day and ours, his words are just as significant today as they were when he wrote them 174 years ago. The Random House Dictionary gives as one definition of the word proper, "of good character." The proper men, then, are those whose integrity can be trusted — men who are courageous, daring, adventurous, who allow no frontiers to bind them. The communication of the faith depends to a large extent on the character and commitment of the preacher.

Asbury could well afford to talk about "proper men" because he so well illustrated those qualities in his own life and work which he commended to his ministers. He was speaking to a frontiers people in an agrarian culture, where literacy was the exception rather than the rule, and where life was simple and unpretentious. Some of his models would not be effective in our technological society; in fact, some would be counter-productive. The values for which he stood, however, are as meaningful today as they were in his own day. He knew how to minister to the needs of people — to meet them where they were in their own development, and to help them get the vision of where they ought to have been.

Asbury believed that ministry meant winning people to Christ. He did not go out to save the world in the abstract. He went out to save the individual in the concrete. It was the job of redeemed individuals to work for a redeemed society. He believed that the the church's influence in society must make its actual contact through individuals and upon individuals.

He believed in a person-centered ministry, to which he committed himself during his entire career. At the last annual

conference he attended, November 19, 1815, he emphasized as the "Signs of a Faithful Ministry" . . . "Gospel truth and Gospel ministers find sinners, and they must be preached to with energy. And these ministers must be sent; and to be qualified for their mission, they must, like Paul, be convinced, convicted, and converted, and sanctified . . . Turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God . . . A faithful minister will have these signs to follow him." His emphasis on redemption of the individual is one of the most desperate needs of our day.

Few men have ever worked so gallantly against such overwhelming odds. He was not a well man. One catalogue of his ailments says: "He suffered terribly from boils, fevers, inflammatory rheumatism, sore throat, weak eyes, bronchitis, intestinal disorders, swollen glands, asthma, toothache, ulcers in the throat and stomach, neuralgia, skin diseases . . . and finally galloping consumption." Yet, he submerged these handicaps by his overpowering obsession to preach the gospel. In his Journal, March 11, 1782, he wrote: "I am willing to travel and preach as long as I live." He believed that a preacher should work at his job tirelessly and that preaching was his central responsibility. "I preached" was the most typical entry in his Journal. He believed in the infinite worth of the individual. The Bible was the source book of the Christian life, and he sought to understand it in order to communicate it with effectiveness.

One of the finest commentaries on the integrity of Asbury is found in his Journal, August 7, 1775. It is his reply to Rankin, one of the eight official missionaries, notifying him of their decision to return to England, under the pressure of the conflict between England and the Colonies, he said: "I can by no means leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have here in America. It would be an eternal dishonour to the Methodists, that we should leave 3,000 souls, who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of a good shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger; therefore, I am determined, by the grace of God, not to leave them, let the consequence be what it may."

While a sick man most of his life, he remained faithful to duty to the end. During the last years of his life his travels were triumphal processions. Wherever he went, great crowds came to see him and to hear him preach. He was entertained by mayors and governors. When he visited a capital city during session of the legislature, he was invited to address the statesmen. Methodism throughout America regarded him with awe and veneration. It was not uncommon for a congregation to burst into tears as he tottered or was carried into a church.

It was on Sunday, October 27, 1771, that Francis Asbury landed in America; it was on Sunday, March 31, 1816, that he died. He

was a man with a mission which he never surrendered.

It is this heritage to which we are committed — to serve our day with the zeal, ardor, and effectiveness in which Asbury served his day — remembering always that we are servants of Christ whose mission is to "preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, and to announce the year when the Lord will save his people."

Prince A. Taylor, Jr.  
11/13/71

Asbury Bicentennial Celebration  
in Burlington, N.J.

**METHODISM IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY:  
MOVEMENTS AND ISSUES**  
by Robert J. Williams

It is interesting to note how many national movements have found expression in Southern New Jersey. Unfortunately, New Jersey is often forgotten in general histories because of its geographic location. The "Burned Over District" of New York is famous for revival fires, but Jersey also had revivals. Camp meetings have been popular from the early nineteenth century. Evangelism, pietism, and fundamentalism have all found fertile soil in Southern New Jersey. South-Central Jersey is often called a "Bible Belt" because in addition to these trends found in the Methodist churches other Protestant sects such as Assembly of God churches, Orthodox Presbyterian, and independent Bible churches are scattered throughout the area.

Methodism started after the First Great Awakening of the 1740's. George Whitefield, a leader in that movement, was a friend of Wesley, but it would be forty years before Methodist societies would begin to dot the rural countryside. Methodists, however, did take part in the Second Great Awakening that started around 1800 and lasted for almost two generations. Just prior to this, in 1785, Coke found revival in Philadelphia and believed that the work of St. George's Church was progressing very well. In that same year, John Haggerty entered Elizabeth and converted Thomas Morrell who helped feed the fires in North Jersey.<sup>1</sup> When the state began to share in the great awakening, William Mills wrote on June 7, 1802:

The work of God continues to revive, and a general alarm has taken place. In Rockaway Valley the work is powerful, and many are added to the Church. The Lord is threshing the mountains and driving sinners from their lurking places to seek a shelter in the rock of Eternal Ages.<sup>2</sup>

1784-1790 was a period of rapid growth. 1787 saw a great revival when practically all of the Methodist Circuits added large numbers of members; New Jersey showed an increase of 504. Revival meetings and evangelistic crusades thrived in the nineteenth century and continue today in many churches of South Jersey.

Growing out of the spirit of revivalism has been the camp meeting. Nationally, camp meetings started to grow early in the nineteenth century. Sweet writes:

from the time of the great Western revival onward, for at least three generations, the camp meeting became an increasingly important factor in spreading Methodism throughout the land. Within a few

year's practically every presiding elder's district held such gatherings. . . By 1812 at least four hundred Methodist camp meetings, large and small, were held annually in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Camp meetings do not become prominent in New Jersey until the Gilded Age in America when the national picture had changed. Sweet summarizes the situation:

Many of the old camp-meeting grounds, . . . were still in use, but the rows of tents were rapidly giving place to streets of frame cottages, and instead of the old-time camp meeting revival, the religious services were now interspersed with lectures on semi-religious and even secular subjects. In fact, many of the old-time camp meeting grounds were rapidly being transformed into respectable summer resorts with only a tinge of religion.<sup>5</sup>

Certain features of this generalization are borne out by the response of Jersey Methodists, but the accusation that "only a tinge of religion" remains misses the mark. Certainly, some of the towns that grew around camp meetings are now resorts and Ocean Grove has cottages and not tents; but the successor to the camp meeting, in many cases, is still faithful in preaching the gospel. In Southern New Jersey, camp meetings have been held annually in places near Barnsboro, Hurffville, Bridgeton, Mullica Hill, Swedesboro, and Haddonfield. Some camp meetings have moved each year, but others have grown into permanent settlements like Pitman, Ocean Grove, Ocean City, Malaga, and South Seaville.<sup>6</sup> Each summer, people of Ocean Grove still fill the huge Auditorium, founded in 1869, and live in the small cottages built near it. Many of the great preachers of our day (including Ralph Sockman, Gerald Kennedy, and Norman Paullin) have stood in its pulpit. The camp meeting influence can still be seen: the city will permit no vehicular traffic on Sunday, and all automobiles must be out of sight. No liquor is ever sold in Ocean Grove.

Also, in 1869, Malaga Camp Meeting, otherwise known as the West Jersey Grove Association, was formed. A number of couples have retired into the Grove for its peace and quiet. It still carries on an evangelistic and revivalistic work. Its speakers consist of evangelists, Methodist bishops, and other leading churchmen. Pitman Grove was started in 1870 and has grown into a Methodist oriented town that permits no sale of liquor.

Nine years later, the Ocean City Tabernacle was founded. Instrumental in Ocean City, and also in Malaga, was the Rev. Ezra



Lake. Although Ocean City has grown into a large resort, it has kept some of the early traditions and influences. It is still "dry;" no amusements are open on Sunday, and the Tabernacle will draw upwards of 3000 people to the three services that are held each Sunday during the summer. There is a world-wide search to bring the best possible preaching to Ocean City. Over the years Dr. Sangster from England, Ithel-Jones from Australia, D. Reginald Thomas from New York and born in Wales, Raymond I. Lindquist from California, and many of our local men have preached there. Bishop Corson is honorary president.

At a time camp meetings were dying nationally, New Jersey was starting some of the most lasting organizations. Certainly, their nature has changed through the years; but their emphasis and influence have not changed very drastically. Evangelism, salvation through Christ, is being preached from their pulpits and these organizations are remaining vital, vibrant, and vigorous.

New Jersey camp meetings lagged behind the national trends, and the conversation of the state is also evident in its inherent fundamentalism. A modernist-fundamentalist controversy gained momentum after World War I with the publication of a series of little books called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (begun in 1910). In addition to these booklets which many loyal churchmen welcomed, Fundamentalist Bible Schools were established to keep the flames alive. "The main centers of agitation in the Methodist Episcopal Church were the New Jersey, the Philadelphia, and the Baltimore Conferences."<sup>7</sup> New Jersey was an early twentieth century center of fundamentalism in Methodism and can be characterized somewhat that way today. Methodism is now witnessing the growth of the Good News Movement which is a conservative group within the conferences. The Movement believes Methodism is not sufficiently Biblical in its emphasis and that social concerns have been stressed too much or in the wrong way. The First United Methodist Church, Collingswood is a leader for conservative Methodism. In a number of small, rural churches of South-Central Jersey, the congregations are very conservative in their character and thrust.

The Conference through the years has championed various social causes such as temperance, Bible societies, Sunday Schools, tracts, and hesitantly, anti-slavery. The Minutes of 1855 list standing committees for the tract cause, temperance, and African colonization. The importance of tracts is lifted up in the following excerpt:

We trust the Presiding Elders will see that Tract Stewards are appointed in every charge . . . A man of the right stamp is greatly desired in each congregation, upon whom the responsibilities of this

work is made to rest, to attend to the circulation of tracts, collection of funds when necessary, and acting as the adviser of the colporteur when in his neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

There are no tract stewards in the churches today, yet many of the United Methodist Churches in South Jersey have a rack for tracts in the back of the church.

Slavery and the Civil War made its mark on Methodism as they did on the entire fabric of society. The Wesleyan Methodists split in 1843 over the failure of the General Conference to take a strong anti-slavery position. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, split in 1844 over this same issue when the General Conference did take a stand. The denominational problems over slavery did not have much effect on South Jersey. The Minutes of Annual Conference from 1855 to 1860 did not even mention the slavery issue. The Minutes of 1856 distinguished between colored and white members, but this was stopped the following year. During the war, positions were taken on various facets of the war; but they were often innocuous resolutions like the one which appeared in 1864:

RESOLVED: That we view with pleasure the beneficent workings of the United States Sanitary Commission in behalf of the brave men who have sacrificed their health and limbs in their gallant efforts to sustain our National Government, and roll back and destroy the tide of Rebellion that has desolated so large a portion of our glorious country.<sup>9</sup>

A few representative items from the Minutes might include the resolution condemning Sabbath Desecration that appeared in the Minutes of 1876 or the \$3000 contribution to the Freedman's Aid Society that same year. The "closed Sabbath" has always been advocated by Methodists and the fruits of this are seen in Ocean Grove, Ocean City, Pitman, and in Vineland which was also settled by Methodists. The stand against alcoholic beverages is well known, and the Social Creed in the Discipline maintains this position. During the Civil War, the New Jersey Conference was against rum rations to the soldiers.<sup>10</sup> The Women's Christian Temperance Union now meets at Malaga camp grounds about once a year. Many laymen do not totally abstain, but the clergy are expected to set an example even though they are no longer required to sign a pledge. The Southern New Jersey Conference continues to contribute to the American Bible Society.

Sunday Schools are very important in the life of many of the South Jersey churches. The Methodists have had a historic concern for education as they wanted to inspire the heart and train the mind. There was an attempt to found a college in Abingdon,

Maryland, in 1785; but after operating for only eight years after its completion, Cokesbury College burned. It was years before permanent colleges would be founded. Now there are many Methodist-related schools such as Duke, Syracuse, American Universities; Dickinson College in Pennsylvania; and Drew University and Seminary in New Jersey. In a meeting in Burlington, on September 28, 1790, the circuit riders and Francis Asbury decided that Sunday Schools were highly desirable. By 1846, there were 9,981 pupils in 167 New Jersey Sunday Schools located south of the Raritan River. Through the years, the Methodists in Jersey have founded the Bellevue Female Seminary, Bordentown Female Seminary, and the Vineland Seminary. Bellevue has closed, Bordentown is independent, and the Vineland Seminary is now the Vineland Training School which is known world wide. Various organizations such as the Epworth Leagues or Youth Institutes have come and gone. The greatest institution for high school age boys that has survived is the Pennington School located in the town just north of Trenton. Plans were started by the Philadelphia Conference in 1836; and under the recent leadership of Dr. Ira S. Pimm and Dr. Charles R. Smyth, the school has increased its physical facilities and its academic standards. Under the control of the Southern New Jersey Conference, the school has produced many leaders of the Methodist Church.<sup>11</sup>

Reform has occurred more on the national level than locally in New Jersey. A leader in the reform movement of the 1820's and 1830's was William S. Stockton of Trenton who in 1821 established the Wesleyan Repository, a periodical demanding more democracy in church government.<sup>12</sup> The desire for reform led to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church in 1830, but the desire of the Methodists to respond to the needs of the day has continued to this day. The desire for church unity was seen in the joining of three branches of Methodism in 1939 and then the union with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968. The denomination has been dynamic without losing the essentials of the faith.

Missions have been a great concern of the Southern New Jersey Conference. In 1837, only \$3000 was contributed to all missionary causes; but in 1960, more than one quarter million dollars was given for the missionary program of the Church. Missions are emphasized through mission workshops in the Districts and in the local churches. The Board of Missions coordinates all the work. The needs are great not only in the foreign mission fields but in the cities of New Jersey and also with migrant farm laborers of South Jersey. Attempts are made to meet the needs of people through World Service and Benevolence Apportionments and by special appeals. Goodwill Industries was begun by representatives of the Camden Methodist Missionary Society.<sup>13</sup>

The expression of the faith has changed, but the faith has not, History can yield insight into our present situation and show us a way into the future. We begin to understand, in some small way, our own times and gain inspiration to continue the struggle our forefathers so admirably sustained in past days. We see from the past the great influence laymen have had on the denominations, the evangelistic preaching, the effect on every day activities that the church had; but most importantly, we can see the greatness of a people when bonded by belief in Christ. They helped to build what we have today not only in Southern New Jersey but also throughout the world. New Jersey is but one corner of the globe. Here the people make the memory of their ancestors come alive each day that they walk with the love of Christ within them and live as Christian men and women. The future is for us to carry on the great work that has gone on before us.

<sup>1</sup> John Atkinson, Centennial History of American Methodism (New York, 1884), p. 119

<sup>2</sup> quoted in Atkinson, Centennial History, p. 484.

<sup>3</sup> William Warren Sweet, Methodism in American History (New York, 1933) p. 119

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-160.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 333

<sup>6</sup> West Jersey Grove Association, Malaga Camp Meeting 100th Anniversary Program (Newfield, New Jersey, 1969), p. 1

<sup>7</sup> Sweet, pp. 391-392

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the New Jersey Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1855, p. 19

<sup>9</sup> The Minutes, 1864, p. 28

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>11</sup> Frank Bateman Stander, ed., The Methodist Trail in New Jersey (Camden, 1961), pp. 29-34

<sup>12</sup> William K. Anderson, ed., Methodism Nashville, 1947), p. 56

<sup>13</sup> Stanger, pp. 25-27

## CAPTAIN THOMAS WEBB

Captain Thomas Webb, an officer in the British Army during the Revolutionary War gave spiritual leadership to many of the early Methodist Societies in America. On Sunday, May 21, 1972 Captain Webb's body was moved from Portland Chapel, Bristol to the grounds of the New Room, Bristol. Members of the Commission on Archives and History of the Southern New Jersey Conference who saw the poorly cared for former burial site are grateful for this move.

## CHARLES PITMAN: NEW JERSEY APOSTLE

by William J. Kingston, Jr.

### I. EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY

To investigate the earliest beginnings of Methodism in New Jersey is important; however, if the study of the past is to be of any vital significance for us, it must shed light on who we are now and how we have arrived where we are. A vast distance must be bridged between the scattered, tiny societies connected by only the infrequent visits of the circuit riders and the firmly established Church of more recent times. If we are to speak of being "in Mission," we have to gain a clear idea of that mission.

The distance to be bridged is the nineteenth century. Perhaps it may best be seen in the life and ministry of one of the greatest members the New Jersey Conference has ever contributed to the general Church. This man is Charles Pitman, born just twelve years after the Christmas Conference, converted in 1812 under the preaching of one of Asbury's preachers, served circuits in both northern and southern New Jersey and in Philadelphia. As a Presiding Elder, he developed the camp meeting as an effective means of evangelism. He was finally called to serve the national Church as the foresighted Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Editor of the "Missionary Advocate." After his death in January, 1854, his memory has been preserved in the names of the former Pitman Church in New Brunswick and the Pitman Grove Camp Meeting.

Charles Pitman was the son of Daniel and Hannah Pitman. He was born near Cookstown, Burlington County, on January 9, 1796. As a result of a fall on his farm, Daniel Pitman was severely crippled and died when Charles was six years old. Charles soon went to work on the farm of Daniel Smith, a Quaker. It seems that even then a prophet was not easily recognized in his own country; for in later years, when Pitman was well known as a great evangelist, this old friend wondered greatly that Pitman could preach so powerfully. His son reminded Mr. Smith, "Why, Father, you know Pitman was always reading the Bible and he learned to preach from it, and his knowledge of it helps him to preach to others."

In 1812, when he was sixteen years old, Charles Pitman attended a meeting held by one of the circuit riders in the old Methodist Episcopal Church at Wrightstown, a few miles from his home. At this meeting he went to the altar and received the certainty of the pardon of his sins. He immediately became an evangelist, for he turned down the aisle and headed for his friends. Some of them fled, but others returned with him to the altar.

At the age of seventeen, he became a country schoolmaster, walking back and forth daily with his favorite cat perched on his shoulder. It was at this time, while he taught school at Cookstown, that he began walking to New Mills (Pemberton) to attend the meeting of the Society there and sometimes to lead the meetings of the Society. A struggle was going on within him as he walked the eighteen mile round trip as to his calling and future life work. In the fall of 1814, his cousin, Rev. Joseph Bennett of the Philadelphia Conference, wrote to encourage him in his Christian life and to express his own hope to see Charles in the Gospel ministry. Feeling that his lack of education would hinder his serving effectively, Charles held back. He sought to remedy this by reading the few, available books by the light of pine knots that he had gathered and of shavings from a neighboring wheelwright's shop.

He left the Cookstown school to teach for some time in New Mills in the old parsonage house. He married Miss Mary Newbold of Wrightstown. Charles was licensed as an Exhorter at the Quarterly Conference for the New Mills Circuit in September, 1816, just six months after the death of Francis Asbury. He was licensed as a Local Preacher in March, 1817. The second impediment to his full time service lay in the extreme hardship of the conditions of the ministry at that time. His marriage would have barred him from admission into the Conference because at that time the Church was very particular not to burden the churches with preachers who were married, for this factor would make parsonages necessary.

In the winter of 1816, he and the Rev. E. Page held a series of meetings at Christmas at Three Tuns (Hedding). The effectiveness of these meetings was an encouragement. When, after a brief year of married life, Mary Pitman died, she left an infant son. Charles felt that this event was God's way of indicating to him the course his life should take. He entered the work full time and has been described as preaching in a very calm, quiet way without any indication of his later eloquence.

During the year 1817, when he was twenty-one, Charles Pitman was sent to replace the worn-out Rev. Daniel Moore on the Trenton Circuit where he preached his first sermon in the old church at Academy and Green Streets in Trenton. The appointment included, at the time, merely the churches at Pennington, River Church (Titusville ?), Lambertville, Princeton, Allentown, Crosswicks, Recklesstown (Chesterfield), Bordentown, and Hightstown in addition to Trenton. At the close of the year he was recommended by the Trenton Circuit and received on trial in the Philadelphia Conference by Bishops Enoch George and Robert W. Roberts. He was reappointed to the Trenton Circuit with the Rev. George Banghart.

After a year of good success, Pitman, in 1819, was sent to the Bergen Circuit with the Rev. John Potts. This circuit extended from Hudson City Heights, forty or fifty miles up the Hudson River, to North Haverstraw, inland some thirty-five or forty miles to Ringwood, then southeasterly to Boonton, and on to Bloomfield, four miles from Newark. Within this area there were twenty-two preaching places with just five hundred members, ranging from Paramus with sixty-seven members to Bull's Ferry with one. During the two years of his labor on this circuit, one hundred and thirty-two members were added.

On the eighth of October, 1820, he left the Bergen Circuit to take the place of the Rev. Jacob Moore whose health had failed at New Brunswick. Methodism had just been introduced and was scornfully looked upon by the members of the older, established churches; but the eloquence and the cultivated manner of the young preacher, and the fact that he sang before, after, and sometimes during the sermon, soon turned the tide. It can truly be said that Charles Pitman laid the strong foundations of Methodism in New Brunswick. Beginning with a membership of twenty, forty-four were added in the first year and thirty-four in his second. Because New Brunswick was considered a missionary field, Pitman was ordained under the provision in the Discipline for the ordination of preachers for mission fields and stations. The two year waiting period between Deacon's and Elder's orders was waived. He was ordained Deacon by Bishop Enoch George at the Philadelphia Conference in Smyrna, Delaware, in April, 1820, and Elder in April, 1821, at Milford, Delaware. Bishop George was a thrifty steward, for the credentials in each case were the size of 3x5 cards.

Charles Pitman spent the Conference years of 1823 and 1824 stationed at Bridgeton, which had been newly set off from the adjoining Circuit. It was considered one of the best appointments on the District. Pitman was the first preacher after Bridgeton became a station. It was at Bridgeton that his eloquence of delivery and powerful preaching began to be recognized. In addition, he excelled in personal work among the young men of the community.

It is interesting to note that in October, 1823, Charles married Miss Lucy Ann Gillespie, of Philadelphia. Since there was no parsonage, they continued to board at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes Parvin. Pitman's board had been \$2.00 per week; but upon his marriage, the price was raised to \$3.50. The yearly salary was \$300.

At Bridgeton, as he had from other appointments, Charles Pitman wrote lengthy letters to the "Methodist Magazine" in which he described the revival of religious life in the church and detailed his methods. He became well known as an important preacher. In 1825, he was stationed at Old St. George's as the preacher in charge. The Rev. William Barnes and the Rev. Joseph Holdich were assigned to work with him since St. George's was the central church with Ebenezer, Salem, and Nazareth included in the Philadelphia Circuit. During the year, revival swept the churches and a hundred members were added. The life of the churches in Philadelphia was so revitalized that the four churches became a separate station. One of the most important developments was a whole class of young preachers who grew up under this ministry and went into the full-time work.

In this brief summary of Pitman's early years, we can see his own development and preparation for the wider work which lay before him as a Presiding Elder and something of the transition taking place in Methodism as a whole, from the frontier-probing circuit riders to the settled work in the cities. However, whether in the city or the country, the work always centered on the power of the preached Word and the vital results of personal work with individuals.

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## HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Our Historical Library and Archives is now housed in the Historical Society Room at the new Meckler Library, Pennington School, Pennington, N.J. You are invited to use the material at the library. Regular library hours during school term are 8 A.M. - 4:30 P.M. and 7:30 - 10 P.M., Monday through Friday, and 8 - 10 P.M. Sunday. At other times it may be used by pre-arrangement with the librarian, Mr. Walter Liefeld.

The latest acquisition of most significant note is the 1792 Journal of the Circuit Rider, Rev. Richard Swain. During six months of this year, he traveled the Salem Circuit through Salem, Cumberland, Cape May, and parts of Atlantic County. This Journal was presented by Mrs. Lake E. Laws of Leesburg, N.J.

Our most exciting adventure will be a ten day Society-sponsored United Methodist Heritage Tour of England, October 8-17, 1973. We shall visit the land of Methodism's birth including the Wesleys' home town of Epworth, Francis Asbury's boyhood home in West Bromwich, the New Room at Bristol, and the mother church of Methodism Wesley Chapel in London. This trip is for Society members only. Inquiries should be addressed to the president of the Society, Rev. Robert B. Steelman, 134 Methodist Road, Newport, N.J. 08345.

You may join the Society by the payment of two dollars annual dues to Miss Emily Johnson, Financial Secretary, 333 West Jersey Avenue, Pitman, N.J. 08071. Also available is the Benjamin Abbott Life Membership of fifty dollars. Individuals or churches are encouraged to consider becoming Life Members of the Society.

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